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ARISTOTLE AS A SOCIOLOGIST.

Sociology is ordinarily spoken of as a "new science." In a certain sense this is true; yet social thought is as old as history, and social philosophy as an organized discipline has existed, at least, since Aristotle. Only in a very special sense, therefore, is it right to speak of sociology as a new science. If we understand by sociology merely the effort to apply to social phenomena the method of quantitative measurement, and to interpret these phenomena as merely the most complex manifestation of the forces of the physical universe, then we are justified in regarding it as a new science; for sociology in this sense is the product of modern positivism. But those who reject the mechanical theory of society, together with the idea that the scientific interpretation of society must be limited thereto, have no right to speak of sociology as a new science. When we regard modern sociology as "the more critical, more systematized study of the social reality," we do not make it a "new" science, but rather a renovated and reorganized science. The beginnings of sociology as a science in this sense certainly lie far back of the modern scientific era.

Comte is likewise usually spoken of as the "founder" of sociology. It is true that he invented the name "sociology," and for this the world is indebted to him. But what Comte really stands for in the history of social thought is the mechanical or physical theory of society.¹ With him "social physics" and "sociology" were interchangeable terms, since in his view the phenomena of the physical world and of society are *of one sort*.² Hence he proposed the interpretation of the phenomena of society in terms of the physical universe. If we mean by sociology the study of society

¹ See Comte's *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, *Permière Leçon* and *Deuxième Leçon* (Martineau's translation, Introduction, chaps. i and ii).

² *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, *Deuxième Leçon*: "Quoique les phénomènes (*i. e.*, of physiology and sociology) soient certainement homogènes."

from *that* point of view, Comte seems to be fairly entitled to be called the "founder" of the science;¹ but he cannot consistently be regarded as the founder of the science of society by those who reject his materialistic premises, though they may recognize in the fullest degree his service to that science in urging, as he did, the necessity of freeing it from speculation and from "fractionalism." The scientific study of society, in the sense of social analysis, can be traced through scores of careful observers and thinkers back to the period of Greek philosophy. Unless some peculiar ground of distinction between science and philosophy, other than the mere degree of generality of knowledge, is accepted (such as the positivistic distinction), Aristotle rather than Comte may be said to have been the first seriously to attempt a science of society. He at any rate first attempted systematically the collection and rationalization of knowledge about men in society; and he is therefore entitled as much as any one to be looked upon as the founder of sociology in the sense of general social philosophy.

It may be objected that Aristotle investigated, not social phenomena in general, but only political phenomena; and is hence, properly speaking, entitled to be regarded only as the founder of political science, which is not sociology but merely one of the many particular social sciences. An examination of the *Politica*, however, will reveal the fact that Aristotle treats in it of many things which are far beyond the limits of political science, even as most liberally defined. The fact is Aristotle had a theory of man's social life as a whole; and the *Politica* contains a social as well as a political philosophy. The *Politica* may indeed be characterized as a system of social philosophy worked out from the point of view of the state—a point of view which both Comte and Spencer notably have taken, and which most sociologists are apt to take sooner or later, since the state is the association which

¹ But see Barth's *Philosophie der Geschichte als Sociologie*, pp. 56, 57, and Flint's *History of the Philosophy of History*, vol. i, pp. 585, 586.

is the natural unit of all social thought. The general attitude of Aristotle, therefore, may be said to be that of a sociologist in the proper sense of the term. Indeed, it might not be too much to say that he seems to treat of the science and art of government only secondarily; for only the last three¹ of the books of the *Politica* are strictly given to that topic.

If Aristotle was not only a social philosopher, but the first to put social philosophy on a definitely scientific basis of fact, then the modern sociologist would do well to investigate Aristotle's sociological theories and method. His labor will be richly repaid, for he will find in the *Politica* the germ of many a modern theory and many old ones that are still worth considering. Believing thoroughly that the theories of Aristotle are still worthy of consideration by modern social thinkers and scientists, I shall set forth as briefly as possible and nearly in his own language,² the more important points of his social philosophy.

Aristotle begins with the simple assumption that there are two primary and essential forms of human association,—the association of male and female for the procreation of children, and the association of natural rulers and natural subjects for safety.³ Both these forms of association are natural, not deliberative; and both are found exemplified in the household in its primary or simplest form. All other associations of men grow out of these two fundamental associations. The household, *e. g.*, is the association naturally formed for the supply of daily wants.⁴ The village in its most natural form is in turn derived from the household; it is the simplest association of several households for more than ephemeral purposes. Finally, the state is the association

¹ Following Bekker's order.

² J. E. C. Welldon's translation is the one chiefly followed. W. L. Newman's edition of the Greek text, with introduction and notes, is also valuable and has been frequently consulted.

³ *Politica*, bk. i, 2.

⁴ *Pol.*, i, 2.

composed of several villages in its complete form.¹ Its criterion is full independence, self-sufficiency and self-government.² Like the household and the village, the state has a natural existence; for in it the simpler forms of association attain their complete development.³

Thus the state is a natural institution, and man is naturally a political animal.⁴ The stateless man; the individual not living in organized society, if his isolation is natural and not accidental, is either superhuman or very low in the scale of development.⁵ Furthermore, the impulse to political association is innate; even where there is no need of mutual service, men are none the less anxious to live together;⁶ but at the same time it must not be denied that the common advantage of all is also a motive of union.⁷ Organized social life is essential to the existence of man as man; one who is incapable of association with others or is independent and has no need of such association is either a brute or a god.⁸ The human individual has been developed in and through society. In the order of Nature, therefore, the state is prior to the individual, just as the whole must be prior to its part.⁹ It is the function or faculty of a thing which makes it what it is; and the individual outside of the state has lost his function as an individual.

Finally, man is a political animal in a higher sense than a bee or any gregarious creature; for man is the only animal endowed with articulate speech.¹⁰ Other animals do not advance beyond the point of perceiving pain and pleasure and signifying these perceptions to one another through mere sounds. The object of speech, on the other hand, is to indi-

¹ *Pol.*, i, 2.

² *Idem.*

³ *Idem.*

⁴ *Idem.*

⁵ *Idem.*

⁶ *Pol.*, iii, 6.

⁷ *Idem.*

⁸ *Pol.*, i, 2.

⁹ *Idem.*

¹⁰ *Idem.*

cate advantage and disadvantage, and therefore also justice and injustice. Now these are the principles of that association which constitutes a household or a state.¹ Just action is, accordingly, bound up with the existence of the state; organized human society, in brief, has a moral as well as natural basis.² Such is Aristotle's theory of the genesis and nature of human society—a theory which subsequent research has in the main tended to confirm.

After having thus outlined his social philosophy, Aristotle passes to the consideration of what he calls the "law" or science of the household—since the household is the primary constitutive element of organized society. The science of the household he divides into three parts, corresponding to the relations of master and slave, husband and wife, parent and children. To these three a fourth may perhaps be added—the art of money-getting.³

Aristotle defends slavery. His theory is that there are persons for whom a life of slavery is advantageous and just; there are natural slaves, who by nature are not their own masters, but belong to some one else.⁴ Indeed, the principle of rule and subjection is universal throughout nature, and is equally inevitable and beneficent.⁵ Where several parts combine to form one common whole, the relation of ruler and subject invariably manifests itself.⁶ The relation of master and slave is, therefore, but one manifestation of this law of subordination which holds good throughout nature generally. Those who are only so far rational beings as to understand reason without possessing it are natural slaves.⁷ But natural slavery must not be confused with legal slavery.⁸ Legal slavery is partly right and partly

¹ *Pol.*, i, 2.

² *Idem.*

³ *Pol.*, i, 3.

⁴ *Pol.*, i, 4.

⁵ *Pol.*, i, 5.

⁶ *Idem.*

⁷ *Idem.*

⁸ *Pol.*, i, 6.

wrong. In some cases actual slaves are not so naturally; yet on the other hand there are cases where this distinction does not exist and where the relation of master and slave is mutually advantageous and just.¹ Wherever the relation is in accordance with Nature's ordinance, there is mutual helpfulness and friendship between master and slave. But just the contrary is the case where it is unnatural and depends upon law or force.²

After this discussion of slavery, Aristotle devotes considerable attention to the art of money-getting or finance. Here his attitude is that characteristic of the whole ancient world. He does not favor the acquisition of money for money's sake. There should be a definite limit to one's possessions; the amount should be enough for independence and a good life, but not more.³ The mere acquisition of money is not the function of true finance; its end is in something beyond mere accumulation—in living well.⁴ Aristotle looks with disfavor upon trade and commercial pursuits; for he believes that the agricultural pursuits are the only source of true wealth.⁵ Manufactures he does not refer to, for manufactures in his time, unless ranked among the arts, were mostly included in the agricultural pursuits. Finance, so far as it follows Nature, he says, depends universally upon the fruits of the earth and animals.⁶ Hence, too, Aristotle's opposition to interest. Of all forms of money-getting, he says, there is none which so well deserves abhorrence as usury or interest-taking; for by it, it is money itself which produces the gain, instead of serving the purpose for which it was devised. No form of money-getting does so much violence to Nature as this.⁷

As regards the natural relations between husband and

¹ *Pol.*, i, 5.

² *Idem.*

³ *Pol.*, i, 8.

⁴ *Pol.*, i, 9.

⁵ *Pol.*, i, 9, 10.

⁶ *Pol.*, i, 10.

⁷ *Idem.*

wife, parent and children, they are analogous, Aristotle says, in the one case to the relations between ruler and subject under a constitutional form of government; in the other case, to the relations between a king and his subjects.¹ The husband and father is naturally the head of the household.² His rule over wife and children is in both cases a rule over free persons; but in the wife's case the rule is constitutional, and in the children's regal. In the former it is assumed that both ruler and subject are naturally equal and indistinguishable; while in the latter the ideal is that the ruler should be distinct from his subjects in nature, but one with them in race.³

The second and third books of the *Politica* may be passed over; for while the discussion in them is largely from the general social point of view, it may properly be claimed as belonging to political philosophy, perhaps even in the strict sense. In the second book Aristotle discusses the different forms of polity or social organization, beginning with the scheme proposed in Plato's *Republic*. Many valuable side lights are thrown upon Aristotle's social philosophy by this discussion of various polities. In the third book he discusses the nature of the state. He defines the state as the association of families and villages in a complete and independent existence⁴—a definition which savors of a social philosopher rather than a political scientist. A local association or an association to prevent mutual injury or to promote commercial exchange, Aristotle argues, cannot possibly constitute a state, as all these conditions do not necessarily imply a state. A state is only realized when there is an association of families and households in well-living with a view to complete and independent existence.⁵ But in all this Aristotle is evidently embodying a social ideal; he has left the strictly

¹ *Pol.*, i, 12.

² *Idem.*

³ *Idem.*

⁴ *Pol.*, iii, 9.

⁵ *Idem.*

political point of view for the broader outlook of social philosophy. Aristotle's doctrine of the nature of the state, therefore, may be characterized as largely the doctrine of a social philosopher.

Book four is a discussion of the nature of the most desirable life for the state. It is Aristotle's doctrine of a perfect society,—his social ethic. Now the most desirable life for the state cannot be known unless we know the nature of the most desirable life for the individual.¹ The elements of welfare or of a happy life for the individual, Aristotle says, are three: external goods, goods of the body, and goods of the soul.² The happy man must possess all three, but in different proportions. For external goods, like instruments, have a limit, namely, their utility, and it follows that the excess of them is either hurtful or in no way beneficial to their possessor; whereas, if we take any good of the soul, the greater the amount of it, the greater is its utility.³ It is for the sake of the soul that the body and property are naturally desirable and should be desired by all sensible persons, not the soul for the sake of these. Happiness for the individual, therefore, ultimately depends upon the goods of the soul, which are character and intelligence.⁴ The same is true of the state. The best state is one which is happy and doing well; but it is impossible to be happy and do well without acting virtuously; and the virtues of a state are in effect and form identical with those of an individual.⁵ The best life, therefore, whether for the individual or for the state, is one which possesses virtue furnished with external advantages to such a degree as to be capable of actions according to virtue.⁶ The best polity, therefore, is necessarily the system under which anybody can do best and live happily.⁷ But

¹ *Pol.*, iv, 1.

² *Idem.*

³ *Idem.*

⁴ *Idem.*

⁵ *Pol.*, iv, 1.

⁶ *Idem.*

⁷ *Pol.*, iv, 2.

happiness is to be defined as well-doing; for action of some sort is the end both for the life of the individual and of the state, though such action may be self-contained.¹

Aristotle is not in doubt as to how the state is to realize the ideal which he sets up for it. He has a theory of social dynamics as well as of social ethics. The virtuous character of the state, he says, is not an affair of fortune, but of knowledge and of moral purpose.² Such character can only be realized when all the citizens who enjoy political rights are virtuous. The point to be considered, therefore, is the means by which a man becomes virtuous.³ Now there are three means by which a person becomes good and virtuous, namely, nature, habit and reason.⁴ Nature is given and is beyond our control; but habit and reason are largely matters of education. Education consists of two parts, habituation and direct instruction. The education of the habits must precede that of the reason, and the education of the body that of the intellect.⁵ But as reason or intellect is the end or complete development of our nature, it is with reference to it that we should order the training of the habits.⁶ Hence, the education of the body must precede that of the soul, and the education of the irrational part of the soul, the appetites, must precede the education of the rational part, the intellect; but the education of the appetite is for the sake of the intellect, and that of the body for the sake of the soul.⁷ The principle, therefore, to be observed in education, as in everything, is that the lower is for the sake of the higher.

The education of the young is, therefore, Aristotle says, a matter which has a paramount claim upon the attention of the legislator.⁸ The superintendence of such education, he

¹ *Pol.*, iv, 3.

² *Pol.*, iv, 13.

³ *Idem.*

⁴ *Idem.*

⁵ *Pol.*, vii, 3.

⁶ *Pol.*, iv, 15.

⁷ *Idem.*

⁸ *Pol.*, vii, 1.

further says, should be a public affair rather than in private hands.¹ And it is not right to suppose that any citizen is his own master in this regard, but rather that all belong to the state; for each individual is a member of the state and the superintendence of any part is naturally relative to that of the whole.² Further, the general education of all citizens should be one and the same.³ For in all states to a certain extent all the citizens must alike participate in the alternation of rule and subjection.⁴ As the same person is to become first a subject and afterwards a ruler, the legislator should endeavor through education to make all men good. But the educational system must always be relative to the particular polity in which it exists.⁵ As to the general character of education, it should be liberal and noble and the utilitarian element should be subordinate.⁶ Citizens should be taught what is indispensable and salutary, but still more what is moral *per se*.⁷ It should fit men, not only to engage in business rightly, but to spend their leisure nobly; for the right employment of leisure necessitates a higher degree of virtue than either business or war.⁸ Finally, the end to be sought in education is always the moral character of the citizen, for the higher this character, the higher the polity it produces.⁹

Such in brief outline is the social philosophy of Aristotle; but the wealth of suggestion that reveals itself to the careful student in the pages of the *Politica* we have not more than touched.

The chief value, however, of the study of Aristotle to the modern sociologist lies in the matter of method. Aristotle's method was on the whole realistic and inductive, and yet in the spirit of his treatment he was philosophical, without bias

¹ *Pol.*, v, 1.

² *Idem*.

³ *Idem*.

⁴ *Pol.*, iv, 14.

⁵ *Pol.*, v, 1.

⁶ *Pol.*, v, 2, 3.

⁷ *Pol.*, iv, 14.

⁸ *Pol.*, v, 3; iv, 15.

⁹ *Pol.*, v, 1; iv, 14, 15.

or trace of "one-sided" views. He started with the facts in human society as they presented themselves to him, and sought for their explanation in the nature of man, without any *metaphysical* assumption as to the relation of man to his physical environment. In thus explaining human society primarily in terms of man rather than in terms of the physical universe, Aristotle was, I believe, truly scientific in his methods. He sought furthermore to reason from purely empirical data to general principles, correlating his conclusions with all known facts. Thus his method was consistent with the wide synthesis which he attempted,—it was philosophical; and his resulting interpretation of society took the form of a general social philosophy which was in accord with his whole philosophical system. In all this Aristotle contrasts strongly with Comte. No doubt Comte was right when he opposed the true method of sociology to that of *speculative* philosophy and proclaimed the separation of the former from the latter. But he was wrong in divorcing sociology absolutely from philosophy, as he did by denying a positive character to all knowledge which transcended that of "social physics." Philosophy like science tends more and more to assume a non-speculative character and to rear itself on a basis of facts. A true philosophy and a true social science cannot therefore be opposed to each other, as Aristotle clearly saw. On the contrary sociology must, in order to be something more than a fragmentary and one-sided interpretation of society, take on a philosophic character, that is, as has been said by Professor A. W. Small, "Sociology to deserve respect must become an accredited section of general philosophy."¹

Before concluding this paper we must notice two wrong ways, among many, of viewing Aristotle's social philosophy. One is the attitude of the man who looks upon Aristotle as an authority from whom there is no appeal; who supposes that his social theories are something final, his system so com-

¹ *American Journal of Sociology*, July, 1898, p. 113.

plete and perfect that we have only to turn to it to find the full truth. The other is the attitude of the man who views Aristotle's social philosophy as if it were a product of the nineteenth century, who forgets its social and historical setting and considers it merely as a product of reason, not as also a product of the conditions of its age. Greater injustice could hardly be done Aristotle than by these two views of his philosophy,—not even by the man who refuses to look into his books. Aristotle must be put at the beginning, not at the end, of social philosophy. Just because he was the first truly scientific social thinker, his theories must not be taken as final nor considered as the embodiment of the full truth. Nor must they be hastily condemned because they in some places jar upon our modern feelings or fail to fit in with modern conditions. Their true worth can be perceived only when they are viewed in their historical perspective. Regarded as a product of Greek life and looked upon as the first attempt to work out a consistent and systematic philosophy of human society, Aristotle's theories have a double significance and a double value to the social thinker of the present.

For this very reason, as well as for others, Aristotle's social philosophy may well be taken as a point of departure by the beginner in sociology. The calmness of Aristotle's reasoning and the sanity of his theories, as compared with those of many modern writers, will be found a wholesome corrective for much of the "scientific" speculation of the present; while the historical point of view afforded by taking Aristotle as a point of departure will keep the young student from falling into many misconceptions. In a certain sense, therefore, a return to Aristotle is most desirable in present-day sociology. Taking Aristotle as a starting point and noticing the development in social thought since his day would clarify the atmosphere of social speculation wonderfully; while some of the old Greek concepts of man and society might still be found to be well worth exploiting.

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